

Socialist Worker

(01) 8722682 <http://www.swp.ie> swp@clubi.ie

PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY €1.00 / £0.70p

inside:

THE
ZAPATISTA
RISING
TEN
YEARS ON
PAGE 5

EU JUSTICE CHIEFS
MEET IN IRELAND
TO BUILD THE
WALLS OF
**FORTRESS
EUROPE**
PAGE 6 & 7

AS IRISH EU PRESIDENCY BEGINS...

ANOTHER EUROPE POSSIBLE!

CALL FOR EUROPEAN-WIDE STRIKE

The European Trade Union Confederation have called for mass protests—including industrial action—when the EU Finance Ministers meet in Ireland on April 2nd and 3rd.

In an unprecedented move they want 'millions to be involved' in the co-ordinated protests to change the direction of the EU.

John Monks, General Secretary of the ETUC, said that 'Social Europe is under threat along with the national collective bargaining and welfare systems of individual member states.'

Attempts

'There are widespread attempts by Governments, including those of the Centre left to, weaken welfare unilaterally and privatise public services...'

The call follows mass protests in many European countries over issues like 'pension reform.'

These are usually proposals for workers to work for a longer period of their lives to make up for the fact that employers speculated with their pensions funds and lost billions on the world stock exchanges.

The ETUC call for action needs to be taken up by the Irish trade union movement. Bertie Ahern and Mary Har-

ney say they want to use the EU Presidency to push the 'Lisbon agenda'.

Harney has explained that this means a 'a business environment in which enterprise can prosper, in which regulatory burdens are eased'.

jargon

This is EU jargon for more privatisation and tax cuts to push up profits.

The coming attacks on

Aer Rianta, Dublin Bus and An Post show what the policies mean in practice.

We need huge pressure from the rank and file to make the mass protests in Ireland a reality.

We call on all supporters of Socialist Worker to put down a resolution at their union branches to call for mass protests and strike action on April 2nd and 3rd.

Racist BBC man first had a go at the Irish



NO reader of *Socialist Worker* will shed a tear for poor old racist daytime TV creep Robert Kilroy Silk. The daytime BBC chat show host has been dropped by the channel after he wrote that all Arab's were "suicide bombers, limb amputators, women repressors," in the *Daily Express*. However this is not the first time that the former Labour Party MP and big supporter of the invasion of Iraq has let his bigoted views be known. In 1992 while on air he talked about an Irish politician who he called "a redundant second rate politician from a country peopled by peasants, priests and pixies." At least he has been consistent in his ignorance!

We are working harder but still losing our jobs!

THE madness of the capitalist system was once again highlighted in recently released economic figures. Firstly Irish workers are working harder and are more productive than they were in 2002. Industrial production rose again in November last year when it was running at almost 16 per cent ahead of the same month in 2002. But while workers may be more productive many more of us are being made redundant! In 2003 there were 27,700 redundancies the highest number in 19 years! According to the *Irish Times* "Indigenous industry in particular seems to have suffered in recent months as pressure grows to rationalise and cut costs to try and protect profit margins."

Socialist Worker

Paper of the Socialist Workers Party
Published fortnightly
For circulation or editorial contact:
Socialist Worker,
PO Box 1648 Dublin 8
Tel: (01) 872 2682
Fax: (01) 872 3838
Email: swp@clubi.ie
Web: www.swp.ie

FF-PD government spends \$ 12.5m on missile system

WHILE the Fianna Fail/PD government slash spending in both health and education they have found some spare cash to spend on a new weapon system for the Irish army!

In fact it is the single biggest military purchase in the history of the Irish state. The United States government and the giant American arms company Raytheon/ Lockheed-Martin earlier in the month said that they "were very pleased" that the FF/PD government had bought the missile system. FF/PD have bought the Javelin anti-tank guided missiles. The US Congress approved the sale of the Javelin, which saw some combat service in Iraq. Overall the sale will be worth \$26m to the US manufacturers and government. Raytheon Lockheed Martin

has a plant in Derry and issued a statement last week highlighting the deal following demands from Derry City Council. The company assures them that its plant in Derry is not involved in the production of any form of military hardware or software.

Raytheon claim that their Derry workers are not involved in any direct military manufacturing!

Protests

There were also protests in Derry's Guildhall Square last

week by anti-war activists. Ominously the sale requires a US government and company team to remain in Ireland for two years to assist in the delivery and deployment of the missiles. The Irish army is becoming increasingly militarised by the Irish government in preparation

for its role in any future European army and its continued role within the NATO organised Partnership for Peace. Combined with the continued use of Shannon Airport by the US military Ireland's relationship with NATO grows ever closer.

Irish economy one of the most neo-liberal in the world

IRELAND is still the fifth most privatised and 'open' economy in the world. According to the 2004 Wall Street Jour-

nal index Ireland's 12.5 per cent corporation tax "beats the EU average of 30 per cent by a wide margin." Ireland only comes in behind Hong Kong, Sin-

gapore, New Zealand and Luxemburg in the table. Ireland even beats countries like the United States and Canada when it comes to having a neo-liberal globalised

economy. No doubt this fact will be celebrated by Ahern and Harney but try telling workers such as those in Treton Sport Ltd in Portlaois that it is a good thing.

Some 68 jobs have been lost at the company as Treton Sport have decided to relocate their tennis ball manufacturing company to the Far East to increase their profits.

Bush admits there were no WMDs

THROUGH his own actions Bush has finally proved beyond any doubt what those of us who were against the war always knew—there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The Bush administration has quietly withdrawn its 400 member team it sent to Baghdad to scour Iraq for evidence of WMDs. The team that was known as the Joint Captured Material Exploitation Group has now been quietly disbanded by Bush, thus acknowledging that the weapons issue was just an excuse to invade Iraq. While Blair still talks about finding these weapons Bush has quietly admitted that no such weapons exist in Iraq and has abandoned the sham search. According to the *New York Times* a senior official said that dozens of linguist and intelligence analysts who were assigned to the team have now been transferred to anti-insurgency duties to combat the growing Iraqi resistance.



■ Iraq: Resistance grows. US soldiers face demonstrators in January.

Washington report lashes invasion

A REPORT from a Washington based research foundation has slammed the Bush regime and its invasion of Iraq.

The mainly conservative Carnegie Endowment for International Peace group has just published a scathing report on Bush's case for war. The Carnegie report WMD

in Iraq Evidence and Implications said that President Bush's case for war was "deeply flawed" and used faulty intelligence.

Iraqi Resistance hasn't gone away you know

WHILE supporters of the invasion of Iraq argued that the capture of Saddam Hussein would lead to the melting away of Iraqi resistance events on the ground have proved them wrong.

And you only have to ask Britain's 'top envoy' in Iraq Jeremy Greenstock. Speaking to reporters' just hours before Blair's visit to Iraq Greenstock said that the resistance was growing despite Saddam's capture. "The Iraqi resistance is getting more sophisticated and there will be bigger attacks on coalition forces in the future," he said. "The opposition is getting more sophisticated."

Oil companies ignore victims

RELATIVES of the Whiddy disaster victims expressed their disgust earlier this month, on the 25th anniversary of the explosion that no wreath was laid by the oil companies in memory of the 50 people who died.

One workmate of the 50 west Cork oil workers killed when the

oil tanker Betelgeuse exploded in January 1979 told the national papers that he was "sick and disgusted" by the failure of the oil firms involved to lay flowers at the memorial in Bantry.

Furious

Friends of the victims said

that they were furious with the failure of the oil companies to remember the dead. "With all the millions and billions in the oil industry why can't a € 30 wreath be laid on the anniversary just to commemorate the workers," said one relative.

THE MAN ON THE MOON

AN increasingly unpopular President with a difficult war abroad and increasing economic problems at home enters election year, and what does he do? He talks about the stars! George Bush is not the first President who has opportunistically turned voters' attention skywards in an attempt to get them to forget what he is doing here on

earth. However his new plan to send astronauts back to the moon and eventually establish a science base there is ridiculous by his standards. Bush has never even shown any interest in space travel. In all his years as governor of Texas he never once visited the Houston space centre!

editorial

NO TO A NEO-LIBERAL EUROPE

No to Brennan's Privatisation Onslaught

AS the Irish Presidency of the EU begins the privatisation onslaught at home also began in earnest.

The Minister for Transport's warning to the unions in Dublin Bus and Aer Rianta that they would have to face up to "inevitable changes" brought instant reaction from union members.

Workers knew that this was political spin for "privatisation". Brennan is one of the most ideological members of the cabinet and is hell bent on breaking up Aer Rianta and the privatisation of a high number of Dublin Bus and CIE routes.

An angry meeting of 250 SIPTU members mandated their officials to prepare for strikes to disrupt Ireland's presidency of the EU. Aer Rianta Worker Director Peter Dunne said the action could disrupt foreign dignitaries arriving for an EU meeting in Dublin on 22 and 23 January.

Talks

As Socialist Worker went to press the union leadership had decided to re-enter talks with Brennan and strike action had been called off in the short term. However Brennan and the FF/PD government are wedded to their neo-liberal agenda which is mirrored in the policies of the EU.

Brennan continues with his privatisation push despite the fact that a government commissioned Pricewaterhouse Cooper study said that Dublin Bus was one of the most efficient and least subsidised services in Europe and that the break up of Aer Rianta would make "no economic sense".

In 2002 Dublin Bus made a profit of 3.4 million. This was the result of the huge efforts of the staff. The bus service was traditionally run down by various governments, particularly during the Haughey years of the late eighties.

At one point the state subsidy for Dublin Bus was cut from an annual

subvention of £24 million to a miserly £5.6 million. The result was that in 1995 Dublin Bus came close to all-out bankruptcy. Since then state policy has changed and after 1999, the annual subvention grew massively.

The government figured that it was in the wider interests of Irish capitalism to have more buses on the streets to get people to and from work. Dublin Bus workers also agreed to major efficiency changes—giving seven productivity deals in recent years.

Declared

Shortly after taking office in June 2002 Brennan declared that one quarter of Dublin's bus routes would be operated by private companies. He now wants to see this happening by May this year. In December last year he also said that Bus Eireann would see one-quarter of its routes opened to competition.

This right-wing drive towards privatisation by Brennan is part of the wider EU agenda of implementing neo-liberal policies in the member states.

The proposed new EU constitution prepares the way for privatisation of health and education services as part of the Common Commercial Policy. To add to this the Constitution extends the powers given to the European Commission by Article 133 from the Nice Treaty in relation to the promo-



■ Dublin Airport: Stop the break-up

tion of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. This will allow the Commission to push through the WTO agenda of privatisation and deregulating of all our public services.

What is happening in Dublin Bus and Aer Rianta is just one part of a

broader European picture that can be summed up in two words—corporate globalisation.

Across Europe the top multinationals want to turn every aspect of our lives into a commodity they can make profit from.

They push the mantra of 'de-regulation' and 'competitiveness' in the corporate media that they control. But in the end privatisation only works against the majority of people and benefits the rich.

In Britain transport privatisation has brought increased bus fares, which have gone up 87 per cent in real terms since 1974. It has also led to a worse off peak and evening service.

The Director of Transport 2000 says they are infrequent at times when companies reckon they can make less profits.

Workers in Dublin Bus, CIE, and Aer Rianta are at the forefront in the struggle against privatisation and the neo-liberal agenda that our bosses and governments are pushing right across Europe.

Their struggle is all the more important in this time of Ireland's EU presidency

The rich get away with it

A year ago there was some media speculation that the owners of the Ansbacher Caymen bank would have to foot a bill of up to €100m because of their involvement in the tax scandals.

However last week it was announced the owners of Ansbacher Caymen Ltd had

reached a €7.5m settlement with the Revenue Commissioners as part of the ongoing investigation into the tax evasion scandal.

A measly €7.5 million is nothing to this massively rich institution.

Controlled by Charles Haughey's former accountant

the late Des Traynor the Ansbacher scheme involved some of the country's richest people who stashed their profits away in the Caymen Islands.

First Rand Ltd the owners of the bank bought it for €75 in 1992 and will be smiling after this rotten deal made with the Revenue.

Garda Abuse: Not news to working class

THE recent Prime Time programme that focused in on the activities of the Irish Gardai would not have come as much of a surprise to many working class people.

The widespread abuses and perjury detailed in a television programme have led to much media talk about the "tiny numbers of Guards" involved in such practices.

However in many working class communities in Dublin and in other cities across Ireland the problem is not with just individual Gardai but with the force as an institution.

A conservative politician like Fine Gael's Brian Hayes came out and said that there was a problem with how the

Garda interacted with people who lived in working class areas of his constituency.

Interestingly many of the incidents of Garda brutality chronicled in the Prime Time programme happened to middle class people.

Roughed Up

Many working class people who have been 'roughed up' by the Gardai or who have a complaint about the force never even bother reporting such incidents. The Garda Complaints Board has proved to be a joke and Minister McDowell is dragging his feet on introducing a Garda Ombudsman.

Incidents such as the attack on the May Day anti-capitalist

protestors two years ago, Abbeylara, and the investigations into Garda corruption in Donegal have thrown more light on the workings of the force.

According to a report produced in September by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) there are huge problems in the force.

One of the allegations in the report said that a person interviewed by the committee in Cork prison alleged that four or five police officers dragged him down the stairs at the Anglesea Street Garda station in Cork and that they repeatedly struck him with batons. Following the arrival of this person at Cork

prison the prison doctor noted '4 fresh marks on back, prior to committal'.

In another incident in Cloverhill prison a person alleged that at the time of his arrest a garda had twisted his arm. Subsequently at Store Street Garda station a garda had struck him on several occasions with a baton on the head, blows which he deflected by raising his arms.

Examined

Although the doctor who examined him at the Garda station five hours after his arrest found only handcuff marks on his right wrists and injection marks on his lower arms, the medical screening on

his arrival in prison the following morning found 'superficial haematomas and contusions on the lower left arm'.

While socialists should call for the greatest accountability as possible over the actions of the Gardai, in the end a post such as a Garda ombudsman would not solve all the problems. The Gardai are part of the capitalist state and thus in the end carry out the function of protecting the status quo and those at the top.

A truly democratic policing force reflecting the wants and needs of working class communities could only come to pass as part of the general struggle against capitalism and the fight for socialism.



Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet. A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.

REVOLUTION

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy. To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based much greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth. Bush's "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the working class. We are for full social, economic and political equality for women. We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Blair government. Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'. We want to see an Irish workers republic where all workers gain. Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party. This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system. We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc. We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.

Join the Socialists!

To join the Socialist Workers Party or for more information: Fill in the form and Send to:

ROI: SWP PO Box 1648, Dublin 8, Phone (01) 872 2682

NI: SWP PO Box 143, Mallusk Road, Mallusk, Phone

0774 2531617

Email swp@clubi.ie Web: www.swp.ie

I want to join the Socialist Workers Party

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....

Email.....

Union/College.....
(If applicable)

comment

Eamonn
McCann

Bush set to collect the peace dividend

CAMPAIGNERS against the arms trade scored a victory in Derry at the beginning of January when the city council passed a resolution condemning the global arms industry and instructing the town clerk to write to Raytheon for confirmation that no military equipment is being produced at its Derry plant.

Raytheon, the third-biggest arms manufacturer in the world, was introduced to Derry five years ago by Nobel Peace Prize winner John Hume. Both Hume and fellow 1998 Peace Laureate David Trimble cited the arrival of the company as evidence of a "peace dividend".

The glaring irony helped focus attention on the company's start-up in Derry. The Foyle Ethical Investment Campaign (FEIC) was the result. FEIC led a dogged, imaginative campaign which culminated in the special council meeting and resolution.

Although the SDLP and Sinn Fein supported the FEIC motion, their position wasn't clear-cut. Both parties said they'd want Raytheon out if it was discovered armaments were being produced in Derry. But they accepted Raytheon's assurances that this wasn't so. FEIC doesn't take Raytheon's word, but didn't highlight this difference on the day. The motion was "as much as we could have hoped for," said a spokesperson, adding that the council vote had confirmed "the integrity of the peace process".

Boasted

However, on the same day, January 7th, news came from Tuscon, Arizona, which threw light from a different angle on what's at stake in the Raytheon issue and put a question mark against "the integrity of the peace process." Raytheon announced that the Irish Government had ordered a batch of its Javelin anti-tank missiles.

The Javelin, boasted the company, is "the world's first, one-man-transportable fire-and-forget anti-armour missile system. It saw extensive use by US and allied soldiers, marines and Special Forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Javelin is approved for international sales through the US Army's Foreign Military Sales System."

The last sentence is key. The Javelin is a high-tech state-of-the-art weapon which can only be exported after the US Army has scrutinised the sales contract and approved both the purchasing government and the purposes to which it's intended the weapon will be put. The Dublin deal, said Raytheon, "the first sale (of the Javelin) to a neutral, non-aligned nation," would "provide the Irish Defence Forces with a highly effective means of deterrence in front-line peace-keeping missions, (allowing) a single soldier to defeat all known armoured vehicles."

Clearly, Southern Ireland is now seen as a State which can be counted on to make no move which the US military might disapprove of. The "front-line peace-keeping missions" will be such as to meet US approval. "Neutral and non-aligned" the South might be, but neutral and non-aligned on a particular side.

It was this development announced in Tuscon, rather than the passage of the resolution in Derry Guildhall the same day, which was the more significant for understanding the "peace process."

Welcomed

The Dublin Government, the SDLP and Sinn Fein have all warmly welcomed the US as arbiter and supervisor of the peace process. It's commonly suggested that the US has undertaken this role selflessly, that there's nothing in it for Washington, that it has no implications for attitudes to US power generally. Sinn Fein leaders in particular maintain that they can work with the Bush administration as allies as far as the Agreement is concerned, while opposing US empire-building elsewhere.

But it's a nonsense to imagine that the relationship which has developed between the US and Ireland with regard to the peace process is entirely separate from the developing relationship illustrated in the Javelin deal.

From the point of view of Bush, Powell etc., Raytheon's deal with Dublin represented another little fragment of the New World Order falling into place—all the more neatly on account of the peace process.

There's a peace dividend alright, paid out in political influence, and presently being pocketed by George Bush.

Why is racism on the rise?



■ **Racist graffiti in Belfast insulting immigrants, and rising tide of racist attacks**

by **BARBARA
MULDOON**

THE sickening racist attacks that made headlines in the North in the last few weeks were not random acts of violence by a few mindless thugs.

They were the orchestrated act of loyalist paramilitary groups who have a long-standing relationship with far right Nazi groups such as the BNP and Combat 18.

The majority of racist attacks in Northern Ireland never make the headlines.

Recorded figures show that on average every non-white person living in Northern Ireland will be attacked at least once.

These attacks range from spitting and verbal abuse to physical assault.

Racism is on the rise in Northern Ireland for a number of reasons.

The racist abuse and lies heaped on asylum seekers by politicians and the press is undoubtedly the main reason.

The fact that Europe's leaders dishonestly refer to asylum seekers flooding the area encourages people to think that anyone who isn't European looking is an asylum

seeker.

In fact the majority of the minority ethnic population in the North live and work here permanently.

That population is tiny—about 15,000 people or just one percent of the overall population.

Official

Northern Ireland has very few asylum seekers.

There are no official figures for the number of asylum applications made in the North but it is certainly no more than 100 people every year.

We know from NGOs that if we add together everyone who has ever been granted asylum here plus those awaiting decisions on their applications, it comes to less than 3,000.

Blair, who is spending billions of our taxes on the Iraqi occupation, accused "foreigners" of defrauding the NHS of £200 million.

Those targeted by his vitriol included what New Labour calls "maternity tourists".

The attacks in South Belfast included two women who were very

heavily pregnant and another woman who was the mother of one week old twins.

Resources

The blatant Islamophobia used by Bush and Blair to bolster their "war" and their ever more hysterical security alerts encourage people to believe that only those who look white and Christian can be trusted.

The failure of the peace process to address social need is the other major cause of rising racism.

Levels of poverty in

the North are worse than any other part of these islands.

The lack of public services and resources for working class people is appalling and there is intense competition for housing, health, leisure and other services.

Overt sectarian scapegoating has become less acceptable in working class areas, if not at politician level.

Loyalist paramilitaries, forced to reduce their attacks on Catholics, are turning on the minority ethnic community instead.

The truth about asylum seekers

THE authorities in Northern Ireland are abusing asylum seekers.

Despite a European ruling against Blunkett's plans to deny all assistance to anyone not claiming asylum immediately, this is what happens in most cases.

People arrive here after long arduous journeys, don't speak the language, don't know the rules, and are often terrified.

Yet, they are expected to announce at the airport or docks where they

first land that they want to claim asylum.

Only if they do this will they receive a meagre £38pw to live on.

Out of this they will have to spend almost £10 every week travelling to Aldergrove Airport to sign on with immigration.

Denied

They are denied the right to work but can be housed by the Housing Executive, which seems to have a policy of placing them in the most dangerous areas.

In a number of cases, asylum seekers have been housed in properties vacated during the loyalist feud.

If they break the rules in any way their claims are withdrawn, they are moved to Maghaberry and they are deported.

If they accidentally cross the border the same applies.

In the vast majority of cases where they comply with every petty rule and ritual humiliation, they are still refused, detained and deported.

Extreme poverty

often forces people to live in overcrowded conditions with others in similar circumstances.

Entitled

The families forced out of their homes at Christmas were denied help by the Housing Executive because they were "not entitled to it".

If the Balmoral Hotel had not offered accommodation to the Chinese couple whose first baby was due within days of the attack on their home, they would have spent Christmas in prison.

British soldiers kick Iraqi prisoner to death

BRITISH soldiers in Basra kicked father of two, Baha Mousa, to death while in their custody.

Baha was the son of an Iraqi police colonel and the last time his father saw him was when he was lying with seven others on a marble floor in the Haitham Hotel with his hands on his head under the guns of the British army.

‘Three days later, I was looking at my son’s body’ Lieutenant Daoud Mousa said. ‘The British came to say he had ‘died in custody’. His nose was broken, there was blood above his mouth and I could see bruising of his ribs and thighs. The skin was

ripped off his wrists’.

The eight prisoners were held in a building, which had formerly been the secret police headquarters of ‘Chemical Ali’.

One of the surviving prisoners told the *Independent on Sunday* that their hands were tied behind their back and bags were put over their heads. Soldiers came in and ‘were kickboxing us in the chest and between the legs and in the back. They set on Baha especially’.

Amnesty international have called for an independent investigation. But the British army offered the family \$3,000 in compensation and say they will only have an internal inquiry. The Mousa family has refused this and is demanding justice for their son.

Bush takes advantage of Iranian misery



THE SYMPATHY of ordinary people across the globe for the victims of the Iranian earthquake was matched only by the cynicism of Western leaders and their supporters.

While spontaneous collections for relief sprang up across the US and Britain, George Bush combined crocodile-tear “condolences” with demands that the Iranian regime fall into line behind his “war on terror”.

And apologists for capitalist globalisation perversely seized on the tragedy to claim that fewer people would have been killed if Iran had a pro-Western government and a free market economy.

Guardian columnist David Aaronovitch claimed the fact that a similar quake in California a few days before killed only three people showed the superiority of neo-liberal capitalism.

In fact the appalling death toll in Iran is a product of the chaotic capitalist development championed by governments of every stripe the world over.

Tens of thousands of people died in the city of Bam quite simply because houses were thrown up using cheap materials with no enforced building regulations.

That is not unique to the Islamist regime in Iran. It is the

pattern in every developing country in the world. It is happening in Iran as it increasingly integrates into the global deregulated economy.

Professor Mohsen Aboutorabi of the architecture department at the University of Central England, Birmingham, has worked in Bam and says: “Many buildings collapse even without earthquakes, because of the poor construction.

“There are building regulations, but people are desperately in need of housing so the authorities overlook the code of building for earthquakes.”

Costs of imports are driven up further thanks to the economic blockade of Iran imposed by the US over the last quarter of a century. And in pushing deregulated expansion, the Iranian government is merely following the prescription of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

It was exactly the same picture in Turkey, a key Western ally, when an earthquake killed tens of thousands of people in 1999.

A similar story could be told of the Gujarat earthquake which claimed 30,000 lives in 2000 in India, a country whose rulers have developed nuclear weapons and backed Bush’s wars while leaving half the population on less than a dollar a day.

In 1988 it was Armenia, in 1985 Mexico City, in the 1970s Italy, Nicaragua, Greece and many others.

Today one billion people across the world live in shanty towns. Forty of the 50 fastest growing cities are located in earthquake zones. Already 58 percent of the world’s refugees are fleeing from the consequences of natural disasters.

Rampant capitalism and its armed wing in the White House mean more disasters such as the Bam earthquake, and more restrictions on poor people moving to safety.

SOCIALISTS ORGANISE...



Growing Left Unity in Britain

THERE is a message of hope from Britain for all those who want an end to war, privatisation and racism in the New Year.

It comes from the organisers of the National Convention due to found an alternative to New Labour when it meets in London on Sunday 25 January.

Anti-war activists, trade unionists, socialists, Muslims, anti-racists, environmentalists and civil liberties activists are already registering for the Convention.

They all want to turn the Euro and Greater London Authority elections on 10 June into a referendum on Tony Blair’s government.

Angered by Blair’s war on Iraq, outraged at New Labour’s plans to price working class students out of higher education with top-up fees, dis-

mayed by David Blunkett’s attacks on asylum seekers and disgusted by New Labour’s love of big business, they are determined to unite around an alternative programme for which working class people can be proud to fight.

Expulsion

For many Labour Party supporters the expulsion of MP George Galloway for opposing the war was proof that reclaiming Labour is no longer a viable strategy. For many Muslims, often—traditional Labour voters, it is their continuing demonisation by New Labour as part of its “war on terrorism” that is the final straw.

Trade unionists still feel the icy wind of Labour’s neglect and students have been on the streets in their thousands to protest at government education policy.

The Stop the War Coali-

tion has given us all a model for a successful mass campaign that can bring together all these forces in a single united challenge to New Labour.

The new organisation will be a coalition. It will focus on the great deal that unites the left, not the issues that divides it.

It will not demand that any person or group cease to defend their own distinctive political views, merely that on those issues where people agree they speak with a single voice, campaign for common values, choose candidates who best represent the coalition and vote for them in the June elections.

If this happens it could lay the basis for the alternative voice that working people need.

It can teach Blair the lesson that he cannot ignore the voice of the people who put him in power and on whom

Labour depends for its funds.

Most of all, it can put the values of peace, equality, trade unionism, socialism, environmentalism and anti-racism back where they belong: at the centre of politics in Britain.

Mirrored

This growing coalition in Britain is mirrored in the closer working relationship between the major Trotskyist parties in France.

In Ireland the SWP has been arguing for greater unity on the left. We believe that there should be even closer co-operation between left wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

Hopefully the coalition in Britain can prove an inspiration for left unity here in Ireland.

EGYPT Standing up to a decadent dictatorship

THE EGYPTIAN state is persecuting anti-war activists it claims are part of the Revolutionary Socialists group. It is currently trying Ashraf Ibrahim for this. Four other activists are also being charged with being members of the Revolutionary Socialists group. AZZA RAAFIAT is a socialist activist who is in hiding from the state. He spoke to Socialist Worker in Cairo

‘THE LAST few years have seen the revival of the movement in Egypt after a long period of stagnation.

There were lots of spontaneous popular outbreaks in solidarity with the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, when it began in October 2000.

The movements reflected the economic and social crisis within society. The movements brought people back to the political scene and opened a window for people to act. This threw the regime into a bit of a crisis. It was facing a mobilisation that it was not strong enough to suppress outright.

Two years after that we witnessed a number of initiatives by different currents within the movements. They created a common space where people could work together on issues.

At the end of 2002, as the US preparations for war on Iraq increased, campaigns against the war began to emerge. The left played a prominent role.

Activists got together to organise demonstrations of hundreds of people on the streets despite the security restrictions. There were six protests from December until war broke out. This helped to create space for a wider movement.

Demonstrate

The call went out that when the war began we would demonstrate in Tahrir Square, the most important part of Cairo.

On 20 March, the day the US attacked Iraq, the wider population joined the movement. Tens of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets. This demonstration occupied Tahrir Square from noon to midnight.

The size prevented the security forces from suppressing it. It was a “freedom carnival”. It was unique for Cairo.

I left the square that night feeling intensely optimistic. We were to protest the next day too. But the regime sensed the danger. It was determined to repress as much as possible so 20 March was not repeated. If we had succeeded there would have been a high possibility of a real intifada in Egypt.

From early in the morning the police started beating and arresting activists. There were tens of thousands there again. The police arrested 800 people. People were radicalised by the oppression.

As much as people were against the war on Iraq, they were also chanting against oppression, exploitation and poverty in Egypt.

In the following weeks there were a number of arrests. The police occupied Cairo for three

Identify

Cairo is a big city. It is possible to find space for political and personal interactions. You can identify spaces where you can live.

Anti-war activists can help our campaign. The more solidarity protests there are outside Egyptian embassies, the more it helps us. The more pressure on the Egyptian government, the better. I believe that the questions go beyond our case. The Egyptian government is a decadent dictatorship.

We need a campaign of solidarity against imperialism, and the oppression that is taking place in Egypt.

Send messages of protest about Ashraf Ibrahim and the other activists’ trial to: Mr Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Abdeen Palace, Cairo, Egypt, Fax 00202 390 1998 or Email webmaster@presidency.gov.eg

EU Justice Chiefs meet in Ireland to build the walls of... FORTRESS EUROPE



Over the last ten years EU governments have worked tirelessly to keep as many asylum seekers as possible out. As the number of wars and levels of poverty and disease increase outside of the “West”, the EU has become more vicious in its desire to keep out the most needy and desperate people in the world.

Moves to harmonise asylum and immigration policies began in the early 1990s.

There were a number of non-binding resolutions and two important treaties: the Schengen Agreement on common border controls; and the Dublin Convention which identified the first EU state entered as that responsible for assessing the asylum application.

The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) further advanced harmonisation with common criteria for dealing with applications, detention, reception, family reunification and deportation.

The meeting of the European Council in Tampere in 1999 to “establish an area of freedom, security and justice” placed the emphasis on common policies to contain and control immigration.

The introduction in the 1990s of visa requirements for people from refugee producing countries like the Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Burma aimed to severely limit the numbers entering the EU. It led to a situation where asylum seekers were forced to travel to Europe on false or forged documentation or without any at all.

At the same time the EU brought in carrier liability legislation that meant heavy fines for any transport company that allowed “illegals” to enter the EU. This led to companies becoming the front line of immigration control and prevents many ever gaining access to mainland Europe to avail of their right to seek asylum.

Increasingly EU states began to locate their own immigration officers in refugee producing countries

WHEN Justice and Home Affairs Ministers meet in Dublin Castle on January 22-23, harmonising EU immigration policy will be high on the agenda.

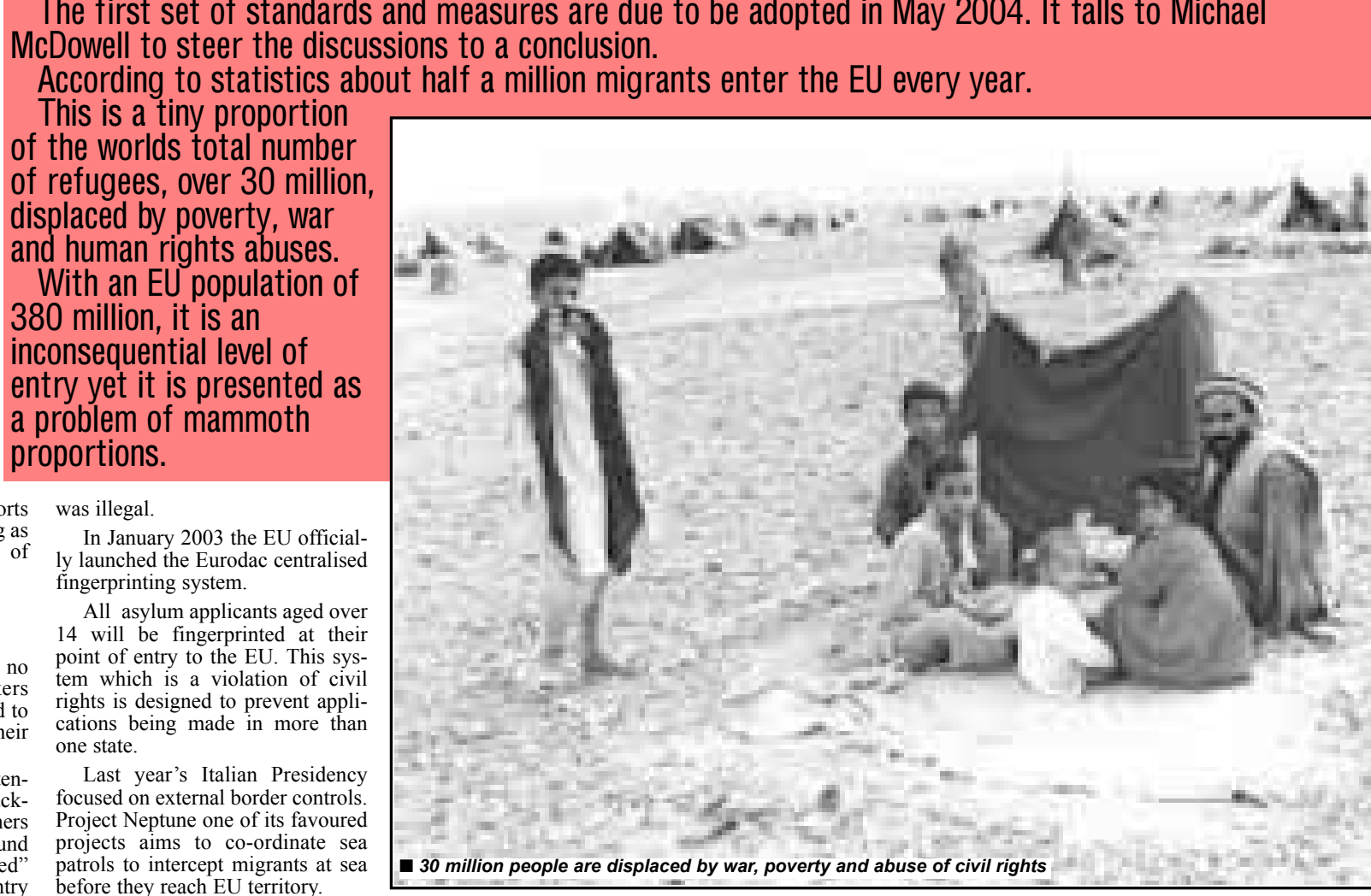
Five years ago in Tampere, Finland Ministers agreed on the need to develop a common asylum policy across the EU.

The first set of standards and measures are due to be adopted in May 2004. It falls to Michael McDowell to steer the discussions to a conclusion.

According to statistics about half a million migrants enter the EU every year.

This is a tiny proportion of the worlds total number of refugees, over 30 million, displaced by poverty, war and human rights abuses.

With an EU population of 380 million, it is an inconsequential level of entry yet it is presented as a problem of mammoth proportions.



■ 30 million people are displaced by war, poverty and abuse of civil rights

to check documentation at airports and ports with the aim of keeping as many illegals as possible out of Europe

Mistreatment

Forced to enter with false or no documentation, asylum seekers have been increasingly subjected to mistreatment on the basis of their illegal entry.

This involves immediate detention in some countries or fast tracking of their application in others where the application may be found to be “manifestly unfounded” almost purely on the basis that entry

was illegal.

In January 2003 the EU officially launched the Eurodac centralised fingerprinting system.

All asylum applicants aged over 14 will be fingerprinted at their point of entry to the EU. This system which is a violation of civil rights is designed to prevent applications being made in more than one state.

Last year’s Italian Presidency focused on external border controls. Project Neptune one of its favoured projects aims to co-ordinate sea patrols to intercept migrants at sea before they reach EU territory.

Immigrants are not a burden!

Governments across Europe both left and right, along with the media, have peddled the idea that there is a limit to the number of immigrants that we can accept before our services and our culture comes under threat.

This is absolute nonsense.

In Britain rather than being a burden immigrants make a net contribution to the economy.

All immigrants have the ability to work and create wealth.

At a time when all across the EU governments are worried about an aging population and the pensions timebomb immigrants can be a huge asset— they are young and prepared to work and pay taxes

Immigration controls are only used against the poor. The rich have always been able to travel the world and to buy the right to live where they want.

It is a class issue but also one of race.

When politicians talk about controlling immigration they aren’t talking about white Americans, Australians or Scandinavians.

Black people are always the main targets of immigration controls.

When immigration laws are tightened, racism is easier to stoke up and the experience across the world has shown that racist attacks increase. Immigrants whether black or white are neither a burden nor a threat and should never be controlled

Slamming the door on asylum seekers

Spain

In a recent report Human Rights Watch found the Spanish Government to be in violation of many rights in its asylum process.

In particular HRW emphasised the failure to provide asylum seekers with information in a language which they understood.

Migrants arriving in the Canary Islands were placed in overcrowded and unsanitary detention facilities.

According to the Red Cross, at times more than 500 people are held in space suitable for 50 people.

Those detained can never leave the centre and get no exercise or exposure to fresh air or sunlight. Volunteer doctors have on occasion suspended their services in protest at the conditions.

Detainees get virtually no information on their rights, no translation and no meaningful legal representation.

They experience serious

difficulties in their attempts to appeal for asylum.

Britain

The new Asylum and Immigration Bill will restrict access to the appeals process and will deny asylum seekers the right to appeal to the High Court for judicial review.

There are also plans to cut legal aid for asylum seekers to a maximum of five hours help while there are also highly controversial plans to take into care the children of asylum seekers who refuse a free flight home.

Britain is also one of the states leading the push to establish claims processing centres outside of the UK and indeed the EU.

Under such a system, asylum seekers would not step foot on EU soil unless refugee status was granted.

Netherlands

In 2003 HRW reported that the Dutch government is increasingly using an accelerated “AC Procedure” to process asylum claims for which it is inappropriate.

The 48 hour procedure was originally intended to screen out cases that were clearly unfounded, but they are now used to process 60 percent of claims, with the government aiming to eventually deal with 80 percent in this way.

This type of fast tracking denies asylum seekers the opportunity to make their case properly and makes it almost impossible to obtain adequate legal advice.

Once an application is turned down all basic material support is then denied.

This means that those who appeal or go through a second determination procedure must do so with no access to food, clothing, shelter or healthcare.

Maximum

There are also plans to cut legal aid for asylum seekers to a maximum of five hours help while there are also highly controversial plans to take into care the children of asylum seekers who refuse a free flight home.

Britain is also one of the states leading the push to establish claims processing centres outside of the UK and indeed the EU.

Under such a system, asylum seekers would not step foot on EU soil unless refugee status was granted.

Ireland’s own rotten record

MICHAEL McDOWELL’s arrival in the department of Justice has reinforced Ireland’s policy of no welcome for asylum seekers.

Following the Supreme Court decision in January 2003 to deny parents of Irish born children an automatic right to residency, the government has made it clear that thousands of families will face deportation over the next year.

McDowell is an enthusiastic supporter of plans for EU organised charter flights to return groups of illegal immigrants to their country of origin cheaply.

The continued denial of the right to work to asylum seekers and the policy of direct provision, whereby applicants are allocated to a centre and denied any financial independence, mirror policies across the EU that treat all asylum seekers as guilty until proven innocent!

Of the 5997 applicants interviewed in 2002 (the most recent statistical breakdown available), just 893 were granted refugee status.

On appeal another 1097 had the original rejection overturned.

This is a very low recognition rate and has been a cause for huge concern amongst legal experts working in the field of asylum law and human rights organisations.

During the Irish Presidency EU directives designed to further cut the numbers of asylum seekers in Europe will be discussed.

They have already been slammed by the UNHCR.

They propose that EU member states are allowed to send asylum seekers to third countries deemed safe; that applications from citizens of certain “safe” countries are not allowed; and that deportations be allowed before appeals are heard.

These proposals are geared towards reinforcing a Fortress Europe. This is the type of racist europe that our leaders want to build.

The European anti capitalist movement, representing hundreds of thousands of people across the EU, stands in direct opposition to this.

At a time when public services are being slashed across Europe we know that it is not the small numbers of asylum seekers who are to blame for our declining services.

Instead it is the greed of the corporations and their political lackeys who want to run these services down and then privatise them for profit that is to blame.

It is the advocates of war and supporters of the European arms trade who divert public money to war making that deny the people of Europe access to adequate health care, housing and education.

It is a disgraceful indictment of this system that human beings in need of safety, protection or a decent standard of living are denied the freedom to escape their plight.

It is time to stand up against the controls and to ensure that the protests during the Irish Presidency challenge Fortress Europe.

US problems grow in Iraq

THERE IS a general consensus in the media that George Bush and Tony Blair entered 2004 in a much stronger position than seemed likely even a few weeks earlier.

The fundamental reason for this apparent shift is Saddam Hussein’s capture, but the agreement announced with Libya just before Christmas also helped.

The Libyan regime’s declaration that it was now abandoning its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction seemed to vindicate the obsession with WMD that Blair restated during his photo opportunity in Basra.

But Libya’s programmes turned out, according to United Nation inspectors, to be pretty small beer.

Both Saddam’s capture and the Libyan deal were at best propaganda victories for Washington and London. They didn’t change the fundamental balance of forces. This was set out with admirable clarity in a two-part series in the Financial Times before Christmas called “The Dependent Superpower”.

The first piece, by Martin Wolf, argued that American capitalism, although the chief agent of and beneficiary from economic globalisation, has also become more vulnerable as a consequence.

The US economy is much more heavily dependent on foreign trade than it was for most of the 20th century, and in particular on energy imports.

As Wolf puts it, “In oil and gas the US appears to be sleepwalking into ever-greater reliance on some unstable suppliers around the world.”

Vulnerable

The US is also becoming more financially vulnerable. America imports considerably more goods and services than it exports.

“This trade gap is financed by huge foreign borrowing, particularly from the dynamic economies of East Asia. By the end of 2002 US net liabilities to the rest of the world had reached 25 percent of national income.

Wolf comments, “The era of the dollar standard may at last be nearing an end. Certainly exploding US liabilities to the rest of the world and Asian asset accumulation on the other side cannot continue indefinitely.”

The second piece in the Financial Times series highlights the danger of “overreach”—that the US will take on too many commitments or find itself unable to withdraw from its many obligations”.

The occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the confrontation with North Korea are already putting severe pressure on America’s relatively small professional army. Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution says: “The US army could find some units deployed twice in a two to three year period.

“We don’t know yet whether

they can handle that. But by the time we have conclusive proof, they may have broken the army.”

Hence the eagerness with which, after going it alone into Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration is now encouraging other right wing governments to supply occupation troops.

In the case of Japan’s Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi this is in defiance of the country’s pacifist constitution. But the pressure on the overstretched American military is unlikely to relent any time soon.

Seymour Hersh reported in the New Yorker just before Saddam’s capture, “Inside the Pentagon, it is now understood that simply bringing in or killing Saddam Hussein and his immediate circle will not stop the insurgency.”

A military analyst working for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad told Hersh, “Mid-ranking Ba’athists who were muzzled by the patrimonial nature of Saddam’s system have now, with the disappearance of the high-ranking members, risen to control the insurgency.”

On the ground the forces mounting resistance seem very diverse politically.

The Pentagon’s response, according to Hersh, is what one adviser calls “pre-emptive man-hunting” modelled on the Israeli Defence Force’s campaign of “targeted killings” and mounted by the kind of Special Forces unit that tracked down Saddam.

Submission

“We’re going to have to play their game,” a Coalition Provisional Authority adviser told Hersh, “Guerrilla versus guerrilla. Terrorism versus terrorism. We’ve got to scare the Iraqis into submission.”

This language recalls other counter-insurgency wars—for example, in Algeria and Vietnam—where such tactics led to terrible atrocities and ultimate defeat for the occupier.

One thing shown by both the crowing over Saddam’s capture and the ferocity with which the Pentagon is fighting the insurgents is that the Bush administration understands how high the stakes are.

Its own political survival and the future of American imperialism depend on what happens in Iraq. Iraq is likely to continue to dominate world politics in 2004.

Join the SWP. Subscribe to Socialist Worker

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Join the SWP ☐ More info ☐

Make cheques/POs payable to Socialist Worker
Return to SWP PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

THE ZAPATISTA UPRISING TEN YEARS ON

NEW Year's Day 1994 and a peasant army of thousands of indigenous Mexicans staged an armed uprising in the southern state of Chiapas, taking over five towns including the state capital San Cristobal de las Casas.

The radical Zapatistas had burst onto the world's political stage proving those right wing thinkers who had been predicting the 'End of History' wrong.

Predating the 'Battle of Seattle' by some five years much of the anti-capitalist movement has been greatly influenced and inspired by the Zapatistas.

A decade on from their uprising KEVIN WINGFIELD assesses the past ten years and looks at the present state of the Zapatistas movement.



'Today we say Basta! Enough!'

ON the same day as the Uprising the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect.

NAFTA required tariff barriers protecting Mexican industry and agriculture to be dismantled, the removal of restrictions on foreign investment and the huge Mexican oil industry to be opened up to foreign ownership and privatisation.

The uprising was the work of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZNL) the Zapatistas. Their name harked back to the Mexican Revolution and Emiliano Zapata.

Zapata's peasant army had captured Mexico City in late 1913 for two months to prevent the landowners from stealing the revolution that promised land reform and peasant rights to the people of the country.

But in 1994 the promise of that revolution remained unfulfilled.

The corrupt Party of Institutionalised Revolution (PRI) had ruled virtually uninterrupted for 70 years, allowing the rich businessmen and big landowners to enrich themselves on the backs of the mass of the population.

Poverty

President Salinas had embraced neo-liberalism and eagerly signed up with the US and Canada in NAFTA.

For the mass of Mexico's 90 million people poverty and inequality was a fact of life. Wages and social spending fell 40 percent in the 1980s and unemployment leapt to 24 percent.

NAFTA was set to make it even worse. At the very bottom of the pile were the country's 10 million indigenous people.

For them infant mortality was more than one in twenty.

As the Zapatista declaration of the time announced:

"We have been denied the most elemental instruction, in order thus to use us as cannon fodder and loot the wealth of our country without any care for the fact that we are dying of hunger and curable diseases; without any care for the fact that we have nothing: no roof worthy of the name, nor land nor work, nor health nor food nor education; without the right to elect our authorities freely and democratically; without independence from foreigners; without peace or justice for ourselves and our children.

"Today we say Basta! Enough!"

But among this poverty was great wealth. Chiapas produced half Mexico's hydro-electricity, exported the most coffee

and was the second largest produce of oil in Mexico as well as a burgeoning cattle industry.

The Revolution of 1910-17 had bequeathed a Constitution, Article 27 of which provided for the break up of the vast lands of the super rich and its redistribution as communal holdings to the peasants.

But even the half-hearted measures introduced over the decades had been

frustrated by the landowners' and coffee baron's thugs backed up by the police and army.

Poverty

The scattered rural communities were under even more pressure when the government repealed Article 27 in 1992 provoking peasant resistance.

To defeat the Zapatista uprising of New Year's Day 1994 the government of

Salinas unleashed a ferocious military assault on Chiapas.

The well-equipped government army faced a peasant army of people dressed in rags carrying only rifles (many of them made only of wood).

But within days Salinas was forced to call off the assault as hundreds of thousands of Mexicans flooded into the Zocalo, the central government square in Mexico City.

The government again tried a year later to crush the EZLN but it was forced to enter talks with the Zapatista and their spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos.

The EZNL rejected the concessions offered as insufficient.

Since then between 25,000 and 60,000 troops have surrounded the EZNL in the hills of the Locandon jungle with frequent periodic assaults on the Chiapas population.

The Zapatistas and Anti Capitalism

THE Zapatista uprising was one of the inspirations behind the Anti Capitalist movement that arose throughout the world in the late nineties.

Here was an army of indigenous peasants standing up against the neo-liberalism of structural adjustment programmes and the NAFTA and asserting their right to live free from the priorities of the multi-nationals and global capitalism.

"We are you," Sub Comandante Marcos declared to the world. "Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian on the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the streets of the metro at 10pm, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student."

These ideas struck a chord throughout the world and inspired the anti capitalist movement. Naomi Klein, the author of *No Logo*, hailed the Chiapas uprising, and wrote a couple of years ago that they have become "theorists of a new movement, another way to think about power, resistance and globalisation. Zapatistas aren't interested in overthrowing the state or naming their leader, Marcos, as president. If anything, they want less state power in their lives.

"The goal is not to win control but to seize and build autonomous spaces where democracy, liberty and justice can thrive. Free spaces, born of reclaimed land, communal agriculture, resistance to privatisation, will eventually create counter-powers to the state simply by existing as alternatives."

But the question of power could not be solved as neatly as this.

Just as the anti-capitalist movement



■ Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos and (top) San Cristobal 1994

faces the question of the power of big business and the state machinery that promotes its interests, the Zapatistas are confronted with the power of the Mexican state that has been attacking it on all sides.

In fact when Klein wrote those words, the situation in the Chiapas hills was extremely difficult.

On and off talks with the government throughout the nineties had extracted an agreement—the San Andres Accords—establishing local autonomy for indigenous peoples, educational, social and cultural rights and committing the Mexican government to eliminating "the poverty, marginalisation and insufficient political participation of the millions of indigenous Mexicans."

But the government had stalled and

ultimately repudiated the agreement.

Sympathy for the Chiapas movement was high among millions of Mexicans. In 2001 the Zapatistas organised a march across Mexico into the capital city. They were met by huge crowds of people in the cities and towns on the way. In Mexico City up to a million greeted them.

Support

Opinion polls at the time showed support levels for this insurgent indigenous peasant movement from the remote South at 50 percent, but the Zapatistas were not interested in taking government.

Interviewed last year by *New Left Review* Marcos told how during the march, "in every town square we told people: 'We have not come to lead you, we have not come to tell you what to do,

but to ask for your help'."

Marcos declared, "I am a rebel, not a revolutionary!"

Although the Zapatistas could not expect to take and hold power throughout Mexico, it could easily find many allies among the country's population.

Shortly before the march, nearly a quarter of a million students in Mexico City had been on strike for over a year. But ideas like those expressed by Marcos meant there was no co-ordination between the indigenous peasants in the South and the students in the capital city.

Half the population officially live in poverty and 15 percent exist in extreme poverty. Mexico City with its 22 million inhabitants is the largest city in the world.

Would a call to these workers and poor to set up their own grassroots factory and neighbourhood committees and ally with Zapatistas in a revolutionary struggle against Fox and his regime have fallen on deaf ears? It's hard to believe so, but in any case the call was not made.

Is it possible to doubt that a massive movement in Mexico that aimed at overthrowing the state and organising to share the wealth fairly would not have found a mighty echo in Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela and the rest of the boiling continent of Latin America?

Today the Zapatistas have set up more than 30 autonomous areas in the remote Chiapas hillsides but are still encircled.

Many of these communities are dependent on the NGOs for their welfare. Last year Marcos announced that the negotiation process they were attempting to set up with the government had been fruitless and had called off talks.

Tragically, for all their hugely inspiring heroism and the clear justice of their demands, the EZLN and the autonomous areas of Chiapas are now hemmed in on all sides by the Mexican army.

The best tribute we could pay to their sacrifice is to fight against capitalism in our own countries, understanding that this will involve working class people breaking the power of the capitalist state and taking power.

debate

More than a Ring of truth to it

by CONOR KOSTICK

THERE are two very different Marxist schools of thought on *Lords of the Rings*.

One is that the book and the film have a fundamentally conservative message since the model of a happy life in the books is the Shire, a romanticised, pre-capitalist, village based community.

Since socialists anticipate taking over modern means of production, the argument goes, then the kind of backward looking yearning for an imagined idyllic past promoted by the story is reactionary.

The other view is that the politics of the *Lord of the Rings* are essentially positive from a socialist point of view.

Not only because the growth of Sauron's power and its potential to plunge the world into darkness seems to echo the threat of fascism in the 1930s, but also because the real hero of the story is Samwise Gamgee, the most modest and indeed proletarian of the characters.

When all the high politics is said and done, it is the staunch loyalty and comradeship of Sam that makes all the difference to the fate of the world.

So the Marxist jury is out, but there is no doubting the verdict of the population of the developed countries of the world, who are buying the book and DVD's in record amounts and who are keeping up cinema attendances.

What is the appeal of *Lord of the Rings*? For a start there is no doubt that the book is a work of genius, far surpassing all other fantasy epics (which invariably have "the greatest fantasy writing since Tolkien" on the back cover).

Despite its length, the *Lord of the Rings* is just the tip of an iceberg. Tolkien was a professor in Old English and used his knowledge of language and pre-feudal northern European society to create an immensely intricate and consistent world. He was in complete and conscious control of his vocabulary, each name weighed carefully for its connotation.

To give just one illustration, Tolkien uses the word "wight" for a certain type of creature, neither alive nor dead, which is exactly how the word was used in sixteenth century Scottish poetry.

Berlin Wall

To read the book is to enter an utterly convincing world, a world with a history, one in which you feel that if you were to explore different corners of it, there would be no danger of it unravelling, but instead more and more detail would emerge. If you want escapism from your books, and millions do, then this is as good as it gets.

The other great strength of the book is that it has an intrinsically interesting dramatic device, a ring which grants the wielder immense power, but at a price.

It will twist your actions towards evil, towards Sauron. The question posed by the existence of this ring to every character who meets it, is how will they react.

The weaker characters fool themselves into believing they can use it safely, the stronger fear it and knowing themselves, avoid contact with it; and the strongest of all?

They draw on their love of gardening and beer and do their best to ignore it. You cannot trust anyone with absolute power, but if you had to, you would offer it to the least political person in the world.

Thirdly, like George Orwell's 1984, written at a similar time, the book holds up the possibility that the world can sink utterly into devastation and oppression. This is a prospect that remains plausible in a world threatened by instability in the form of war and environmental catastrophe.

Our own fears are used to make the characters' fears genuine. And Gandalf in the film says something very interesting to Frodo: when the hobbit sighs with regret that he is alive in such dark times, the wizard replies to the effect that "hobbits make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing."

But unlike 1984, where love itself can be shattered under the right conditions, in *Lords of the Rings* comradeship is what means the juggernaut of terror can be derailed.

The films are a superb adaptation of the book, and not because they have stuck tightly to the plot, there are many changes, some of which, such as improving the roles of the women in the story, are entirely justified.

The real secret of success for the films is that they have grasped the importance of detail for immersing the audience in this alternative world. Instead of squeezing the story into a conventional Hollywood structure, they have taken the time to build up a thoroughly credible environment for audiences to sink into. For once commercial considerations have not wrecked a great literary work.

book

A WRY LOOK AT THE U.S. RIGHT

by KEVIN WINGFIELD

DURING 2003 the American media group Clearwater, which owns 11 percent of all US radio stations, banned the Dixie Chicks from its play lists because of their anti war stance.

Clearwater also used its network of affiliates to whip up pro-war demonstrations to counter the anti war movement in the USA.

Noam Chomsky has relentlessly attacked the US media for distorting and lying about Bush's war in Iraq.

He pointed out that polls indicated that a majority of US citizens had been persuaded of the absurd claim that Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11, despite not a shred of evidence.

Of course the media is not as powerful as is often claimed.

As Michael Moore has pointed out polls indicate that a majority of people in the US are pro-choice, favour living wage legislation and support increases in spending Medicare and Welfare.

The fact that this is kept hidden owes as much to the agenda of the mainstream media as it does to the Shock-Jocks and Right Wing cable channels that have

proliferated in recent years.

Al Franken is a left-leaning US stand up comic. His latest book, *Lies And The Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, is a best seller in the USA and attacks the Republican Right and its media supporters.

In particular he singles out Rupert Murdoch's Fox network for attack. With humour, he explodes their lying agenda and bullying style.

Much of this is very funny. Unfortunately (or fortunately) many on this side of the Atlantic will be unfamiliar with the columnists and TV presenters he attacks.

Fox tried to halt publication of the book, saying its sub-title, "A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right" infringed their copy right on the words "fair and balanced"!

Weakened

With researched examples, he demonstrates how conscious distortion, half-truths and barefaced lies are the stock in trade of the Right and its media hacks.

But Franken's book is considerably weakened by his politics. For him Republicans are bad guys and Democrats,



■ Al Franken: Exposes the Right in the US media

particularly Clinton and Gore, are the good guys who never got a square deal from the media.

For example, the Right accuse Clinton of neglecting anti-terrorism and US defence and were therefore indirectly culpable for 9/11.

Franken retorts with a defence of Clinton, citing his attacks on Somalia against "Al-Qaeda targets".

Even the turncoat

Christopher Hitchens wasn't taken in by this nonsense.

Factory

The "WMD facility" blown up turned out to be an aspirin factory and its destruction robbed the country of one of its few pharmaceutical facilities.

It was an act of war by Clinton, the Democrat imperialist.

There's some good

one-liners in Franken's book which raise a laugh, but Chomsky, with all his weaknesses, is much more satisfying fare.

If you want to see some serious alternative US TV and radio, visit the website of "Democracy Now!" www.democracynow.org.

■ *Lies, And The Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, by Al Franken, Penguin/Allen Lane, €14.99

television

Drama of refugee tragedy

by DAVID LYNCH

WRITING a review of a four part TV series after seeing just one episode is a task fraught with many difficulties.

Much like trying to write a match report at half time the reviewer could make a number of assumptions only for it to all fall apart with a number of shocks in the final episode.

However RTE's new drama series *Proof* looks at least a little interesting, which is always a bonus considering the usual output from RTE. Firstly the lavish series looks very well with the large amounts of money that RTE have invested, instantly obvious to the viewer.

The first episode started with the portrayal of a tragedy that is becoming more common as fortress Europe continues to fortify its borders.

A freight container at



■ RTE's new drama series Proof looks promising

Dublin port is searched and 23 corpses and one survivor are found inside. The fact that the Director of *Proof* has attempted to render onto film such an incident deserves praise. Refugees and Asylum Seekers have been almost ignored in modern Irish drama and art

and this most tragic of situations was captured faithfully in the first episode.

Cliché

We were then introduced to a plethora of Dublin characters that mixed obvious cliché with some interesting social commentary.

Myles Carrick is the leader of the opposition Social Democrats Party (everything is based on reality in this series apart from the names of political parties!) and he makes a point of defending foreign nationals in Ireland. He attacks the government for their harsh refugee policy and

his slogan is "A Caring Ireland in a Caring Europe". Of course in reality no politician of the major parties would take such a stand on this issue and already Mr Carrick could gain the sympathy of *Socialist Worker* readers. However there are already signs that he is too good to be true and he may have ulterior motives.

The, as yet undeveloped, plot surrounds an Albanian woman Nina who is looking for her refugee sister. Overworked and underfed journalist Terry Corcoran tries his best to help her.

With its look at some of the reality of life in Ireland for foreign nationals (there is an interesting scene in a lap dancing club which shows how foreign women are treated in such places) *Proof* is well worth at least a glance over the next few weeks. Let's hope it lives up to some of its early promise.

■ *Proof* airs on Monday nights at 9.30pm RTE One.

FREE SPEECH:
Campaign forces Galway City climbdown

GALWAY: In December there was a great victory for freedom of speech campaigners in Galway City. Coming under major pressure Galway

City Council adopted an amended version of the Litter Pollution Bye-law.
Now only commercial leaflets are banned on the streets.

The new law says “The distribution of advertising material to the public for commercial purposes within the administrative area of the council is hereby prohibited.”
The right of communi-

ty and political groups to take their politics to the streets has been defended.
Victory
This marks a victory for the Defend Free

Speech, Assembly and Activity Campaign which campaigned against the original version of the law which made no distinction between commercial and non-commercial leafleting.

Anti war activist freed from jail

FINTAN LANE has been released from Limerick Prison last week two weeks

ahead of his expected release date of 24 January.
Cork Anti-War Cam-

paign Chairman and National PRO of the Irish Anti War Movement Dr. Fintan Lane was released from Limerick Prison where he had been serving a 60 day sentence following his refusal to pay a fine for his part in a peaceful demonstration at Shannon Airport. Fintan Lane, the PRO of the Irish Anti-War Movement, has been in jail since 26th November because he refused to pay a 750 euro fine.
He was involved in a mass trespass at Shannon airport to protest at its use by the US military.
“What we did was an act of conscience and I have no regrets” said Fintan after his arrest.
“I couldn’t pay this fine because that would be to plead guilty retrospectively and I will not do that. I feel no guilt for my actions.
“Innocent people are being killed in Iraq and Afghanistan by the war machine that is being facilitated at Shannon airport. What is happening is an outrage and it is no exaggeration to say that Fianna Fail and the PDs have blood on their hands”.



■ Fintan Lane: No regrets

DEMONSTRATION:
END THE
OCCUPATION OF
IRAQ
US MILITARY
OUT OF
SHANNON
Saturday 20 March National demonstration on the day of worldwide mobilisation to mark 1st anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.
Assemble 3 pm, Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square, Dublin 1.
IRISH ANTI WAR MOVEMENT

Convention of the Left to meet in Derry

A CONVENTION of the Left is to be held in Derry on February 14th to discuss a united Left slate in the June 2004 European election.
The convention is being organised by the Socialist Environmental Alliance (SEA) and is open to anyone who is for a social Europe and against a neo-liberal Europe, while refusing to be part of either nationalist or unionist camps in the North.
In its invitation to the Convention, which it is circulating as widely as possible, the SEA says it “envisages an electoral alliance of different parties, campaigning groups and individuals offering voters a radical, anti-sectarian alternative to parties based on one or other of ‘the two communities’”.
The SEA interventions in Foyle and East Derry showed that a credible, united left campaign can attract a level of support which cannot be derided or ignored.
Without a similar intervention, the European election will be another sectarian headcount.
But it will take a united, broadly-based campaign to make a Left intervention credible.
The SEA has said that it wants to see a broad alliance covering the north and “are very open to argument from others as to how best we can jointly achieve this”.
However, if that cannot be achieved, they will go forward on their own with Eamonn McCann as a candidate.
Euro elections offer a chance to link day-to-day local concerns to major issues being fought out at European level.
Water charges and environmental issues cannot be understood except in a European perspective.
The rise in racism is connected to the “Fortress Europe” project.
But above all, the sectarian polarisation in the Assembly elections means there is a duty for the Left to ensure a radical anti-sectarian alternative across the North.

Make sure you get Socialist Worker every fortnight



I want to subscribe to Socialist Worker

Name _____

—

Address _____

I enclose _____ 13 euro (£9 stg) for six months (13 issues) or 26 euro (£18stg) for a year (26 issues)
Make cheques/POs payable to Socialist Worker

Return to Socialist Worker subscriptions, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8 Tel (01) 872 2682 swp@clubi.ie
www.swp.ie

For the best coverage of anti-war and anti-capitalist activity, workers struggles and clear socialist argument and analysis be sure to read *Socialist Worker* every fortnight.
Get your copy promptly every fortnight by taking out a subscription and receive it post free.
Fill in the coupon today.

AER RIANTA, CIE: PRIVATISATION FIGHT

This is how to use the EU Presidency!

CIE: Fight the bus sell-off

AER RIANTA workers have shown how Ireland's Presidency of the EU can be used for the advantage of workers.

A mass meeting in the airport last week gave SIPTU shop stewards a mandate to call protests at any time during the Presidency to highlight workers opposition to the break up of the company.

Threat

A similar threat to call action by CIE workers during the first EU Minister meeting in Galway sent the wind up the gov-



■ Aer Rianta workers are fighting airport break up

ernment.

Within hours, Transport Minister Seamus

Brennan got back to union representatives promising to behave bet-

ter.

He promised full and frank talks with the CIE

unions – and wrote Aer Rianta workers a letter to say that their terms and conditions would be preserved after the break up.

However, the unions are still wary of Brennan.

Talks

He agreed to talks last autumn as a manoeuvre for stopping a combined fight against privatisation from CIE and Aer Rianta.

But he kept going ahead with the break up of both companies regardless.

Unless Brennan backs down fully on his plans for privatisation, the plans for action during the EU Presidency could be activated.

LAST year CIE unions mounted a campaign of action against Transport Minister Seamus Brennan's plans to begin privatising Dublin Bus routes.

After a very successful No Fares Day and other actions, Brennan offered talks, but this was simply a stalling action.

He made it clear in public comments in the press that he remained determined to implement the sell-off.

At the beginning of this year CIE unions met to plan a resumption of action for which they have overwhelming support among CIE workers.

However the action was called off following an offer by Brennan of yet more "talks".

As one Dublin Bus worker told *Socialist Worker*, "There is a lot of anger and frustration among Dublin Bus workers.

"Brennan and his government are trying to fool CIE workers and our unions.

"His wants to stop us taking strike action during the Irish EU presidency.

"He wants to pick off Aer Rianta workers first and then use the break up of that semi state as a stick to beat us with in the future.

"These talks are about *How* to break up CIE not *If*.

"The unions need to reinstate action and take the gloves off to seriously fight the break up and privatisation of this public service.

"We need to link up with Aer Rianta workers and use the opportunity of Ireland's EU presidency to really put the government on the spot."

Oxygen bosses concede talks

OXIGEN management have gone into talks with their workers who have joined SIPTU under the auspices of the Labour Court.

The development came in the last few days and there is an agreement to have two weeks of

talks to see if the long fight for union recognition can be resolved.

Fifty seven workers have taken on a company which has used intimidation and bullying to beat them.

A caravan, which was used by the strikers, was burnt down and grease was sprayed on a wall, which

was near where they were picketing.

However, pressure is mounting on Oxygen. SIPTU has embarked on a campaign to win community support for the strike.

Recycle

In conjunction with the Combined Residents Association and the Anti-Bin

Tax campaign they have taken forms around housing estates.

People who fill in the forms say they will not recycle waste material until union rights are granted to Oxygen workers.

"WE have gotten back hundreds of forms and this has put pressure on the company.

"Our morale is high and

there have been good collections to tide us over the Christmas period' one activist told *Socialist Worker*.

When Oxygen turned up to the Labour Court they were represented by IBEC – the bosses union.

The irony is pretty deep. Oxygen were going into talks represented by THEIR union to deny

workers a right to their representation.

And IBEC which claims to be a social partner of SIPTU was representing a company that wanted to keep their 'partner' out.

■ *You can get the Boycott Oxygen forms by ringing the Local Authorities Branch of SIPTU at Liberty Hall 01 8586300.*

Stand up to Council chiefs

THE management of South Dublin Council think they have a blank cheque on benchmarking.

They are trying to push through a draconian deal that will break trade union organisation in the Council.

And they want to put the council workers against the wider community who are opposing the bin tax.

The deal they put on the table will mean:

■ 100 daily extra houses in 2004 and again in 2005.

■ A reduction in spare staff from 18 to 10 with a €7,000 payment for redeployment.

■ Acceptance of all future changes in work practices.

■ Bonus payments for

wheelie bins and tagging will be threatened if routes are not completed on time.

Overtime to be made compulsory.

Nobody expects that the unions will not negotiate on benchmarking. Workers everywhere are willing to give productivity and negotiate changes.

But that does not mean that we give management their "wish list". We need to reject the deal outright and tell the unions to get back in there and negotiate on our behalf.

The Government are using benchmarking to launch a major offensive on public sector workers.

Our unions should call their bluff and reject the blank cheque approach of management.

Bin tax fight continues

South Dublin County Council

BIN workers for South Dublin County Council are coming under severe pressure to introduce tagging to bins in the area.

The tags are an important part of the councils plan to push forward the bin tax and has already been used in the Fingal area.

The system is due to be introduced on the 2 February but there has already been some resistance amongst bin workers.

"The workers are being put under a lot of pressure at the moment and it is being forced in as part of a benchmarking deal," said Brid Smith from the Ballyfermot Anti-Bin Tax Campaign.

"But despite this the

campaign is still very strong in the area.

"We had a meeting last week of the groups in the South Dublin County Council area and over 200 people were in attendance.

"There was still a lot of anger at the meeting and it was decided that the campaign is to stand candidates in five wards in

the area in the up-coming local elections.

"We will be holding mass meetings in all the areas in the coming weeks as well before the tags are introduced.

"These will be well advertised and we want as many people as possible to get involved in the campaign in the coming weeks."

Debt Collectors in Ballymun

A NUMBER of households in the Ballymun area have received letters from Debt Collectors demanding payment of Bin Charges.

Debt collectors have even visited homes demanding payment and in some cases managed to intimidate householders into agreeing to pay installments.

The local Anti Bin Tax campaign has distributed a leaflet pointing out that these letters have no legal status and that debt collectors have no right to enter anyone's home or take property.

One householder who had been frightened into agreeing to pay installments to a debt collector, subsequently refused to pay any more when the position was explained by the campaign.

The message is still Don't Panic, Don't Pay!

NIPSA plan action

AS WE go to press, the Exec. Council of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) is meeting to decide on further industrial action, following the very successful one day strike on December 11th.

There is a real appetite among NIPSA members across the North for more action, up to and including an all-out strike. Many of the civil servants on strike on 11th December are so low paid they can claim Working Tax Credit. So, it's understandable that they want to fight for a better wage.

As civil servants in the North wait to hear what their leadership want to do, civil servants in Britain are balloting for a two-day stoppage at the end of January. Northern civil servants hope the NIPSA leadership will call a similar stoppage here. This could see the most widespread industrial action for many years.

Pressure

Ryan McKinney, chair of NIPSA no. 8 branch says "there is a lot of pressure on the leadership from union branches for more strikes. The overtime ban and work to rule have continued but we need more militant action to force the government to back down.

"When they imposed the pay offer, hundreds walked out in disgust. The anger and the willingness to fight is there. The question is will the leadership lead?"

Ryan says there could not be a more opportune time for more strikes. "With present levels of sectarian polarisation, strikes are important for showing that Protestant and Catholic workers have more in common with each other than with their politicians, who tell them their allegiance should be to 'their community'."

Socialist Worker

PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY €1.00 / £0.70p

inside:

THE
ZAPATISTA
RISING
TEN
YEARS ON
PAGE 5

WHY IS
RACISM
ON THE
RISE?
PAGE 4

STOP THESE RACIST ATTACKS!

EVERY day there is a racist attack in Belfast. In the past eight weeks, pregnant Chinese women and new mothers have been forced out of their homes by racist thugs.

The thugs have gained confidence to attack people from ethnic minorities because government Ministers and even the Prime Minister attack Muslims and asylum seekers in the media with increasing regularity.

But the response of people on the ground to the attacks that have been publicised over recent weeks is one of utter disgust..

Camera

Even in the Village area of Belfast where almost everyone lives in fear of the loyalist paramilitaries who carried out the attacks, ordinary people were willing to appear on camera and voice their disgust.

When the SWP organised a

stall after the attacks, it was noticeable that people from working class Protestant areas, like the Village area and the Shankill Road, were over-represented in the queues to sign an anti-racist petition and to say how angry they were about the attacks on their neighbours.

Hotel

The staff in the hotel where one of the families attacked is currently staying have been so good to them that the couple

have named their son who was born following the attack after one of them.

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities and the Chinese Welfare Association were overwhelmed by the amount of people who brought gifts and money for the couple, including one person who walked in with a donation of £300.

When the hotel in which they were staying was made public staff were inundated with presents for them and telephone enquiries.

BUILD THIS RALLY AGAINST RACISM

The Anti-Racism Network has organised a rally on the 27th January at 5pm outside Belfast City Hall against the attacks to coincide with Holocaust Remembrance day.

The Network is made up of the various ethnic minority organisations, socialists, trade unions, human rights groups, NGOs and people outraged by the growth in racism in the North.

Davy Carlin, chairperson of the Anti Racist Network, says "There has been an amazing response. Trade unionists and others from across the North have been contacting us in their droves saying they want to help.

"We hope that these people will be organising buses and other transport from every part of the North to Belfast for the rally on the 27th.

"With the seeming escalation in the number of attacks and threats against estate agents who let houses to people from ethnic minorities, we may need to have more local protests before the 27th", says Davy, "but the Sat 27th is the day we want people coming in their thousands to Belfast City Centre to say that refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minority people generally are welcome to the North of Ireland.

"We want to send the message loud and clear to the bigots who carry out these racist attacks that they represent no one but themselves and that the rest of working class people denounce and despise them."

Rally Against Racist Attacks: Sat. 27th January 5pm, Belfast City Hall

**RALLY AGAINST RACIST ATTACKS:
Sat. 27th January 5pm, Belfast City Hall**